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EFFIE'S ELOPEMENT.

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"Trust him not, my daughter. I would sooner have you receive the attentions of the humblest man in our village than Albert Barton. I have no faith in his professions. Send him off, dear."

"Father, you are prejudiced against him. You don't know him as I do. He loves me truly. I know he does. Please don't bid me give him up. It would break my heart," sobbed Effie Ashmore.

"I *do* know him, and knew his father before him. They are alike. No woman who trusted George Barton was ever happy—not even the one he made his wife. Effie, I would not have trusted him in the days when my daughter would have been a dowerless bride. How much less *now!*"

"Oh, father, you wrong him; indeed you do."

"No, no, child. Your happiness is the dearest thing on earth to me. To secure this, I would save you from Albert Barton. Oh, why could you not return the affection of the one I would have given you to? feeling assured that he would have made you a *true* husband."

"Father, young hearts will wander, often, far from the judgment of older heads. Albert may have his faults, but I love him; and if you will not give me to him, please do not speak of any other winning my love. I *know* George Wilton is in every way worthy, and—"

"And you, my child, would have been happy in possessing the love of such a noble man, if Albert Barton had not crossed your path."

"Father, if you would know Albert better, you would find out how you wrong him. If he comes to you, will you listen to him and not treat him unkindly?"

"He is not coming, my child. He avoids me ever."

"Because he knows how you dislike him. May I send him? Please, father!" Her eyes were raised, tearful and pleading, to his.

"I will hear him, Effie, and deal justly and gentlemanly with him."

"Oh, thank you; dear, good father! Now I'm sure all will be right!" Effie exclaimed, smiles chasing away the tears, as she wound her arms about her father and pressed her lips to his.

"God bless and save her from evil," he murmured, as his gaze followed her retreating form.

An hour after, Effie was pleading with her lover.

"Go to father, Albert. Talk to him, and he will know then how good and true you are."

"No, no, my darling. It would be useless. He is prejudiced against me, and nothing I could say would be believed. To convince him of my sincerity, I must *act*, not *talk*. Let me go to him when I am your husband, Effie; then he will know I am not what he thought me."

A frightened look came into the girl's eyes as she raised them to her lover's, and asked:

"How can that be? I cannot be yours unless father consents—"

"Then, Effie, we must part. Your father will never yield. And as much as I love you, I cannot humble myself to beg for you from the man who, without any reason, not only dislikes, but speaks falsely of me. But I would gladly prove to him my worthiness. This I can do only in one way. And then, darling, as my wife's father, I will go to him and beg his forgiveness, if you wish it. Now you see, my love, our happiness rests alone with you. What will you do? Send me forth, crush all my hopes, and try to comfort yourself by ideas of duty, and end by marrying one your father may choose for you? Or will you go with me?"

On and on he talked, raising the poor girl's hopes, and exciting her fears, until, bewildered, and very miserable with the thought of parting, she promised all he wished—to elope with him the next night.

Endeavoring to quiet the fear which still shone forth from her eyes, Albert said:

"Only for a few hours, love, will you be absent. Your father will not have missed you when we shall be back again, claiming his blessing on our union. All will be well then. The future bright and happy. Trust me, darling, and cast all misgivings from your heart."

"Yes, Albert, I will trust you. But only think how dreadful it is for me to deceive him who has ever been so loving and kind!" Effie said, her eyes filling with tears.

"Nonsense, you sensitive little bird. You will laugh when you think of these misgivings ten days hence. Now listen, dear. To-morrow night I will have a carriage waiting at the foot of the garden. We will ride out to N—— in less than an hour, where my aunt will be waiting with friends to receive us. There we will be married, and return the next morning in time to breakfast with your father. Now smile, and bid me good-night. I must hasten off to make the necessary arrangements."

It was a very sickly little smile which Effie managed to force, as she bade him good-bye. Scarcely had he gone from her when it ended in a sob of real grief. She could not coax herself, notwithstanding all that Albert had said to the contrary, to think of her disregard of her father as anything but ungrateful, and undeserving of future happiness.

When he came in a few moments after, and bent over her with tender solicitude, she could not raise her eyes to meet his, fearful lest she should yield to that loving gaze and falter in her resolution. Feigning headache, she closed her eyes, but sleep came not to relieve her anxious heart, even for a brief hour. Many times, during that long, miserable night, she almost made up her mind to write and tell Albert she could not desert her father; but the thought of giving up her lover, "parting from him forever," as he had told her they should, unless she yielded to his wishes, almost broke her heart. And so, trying to console herself with the hope of a speedy return, and her father's blessing on her union, she arose early the next morning and went about making some little necessary preparations for her marriage.

Mr. Ashmore's business kept him from home nearly all of the day, which relieved Effie's heart of a great deal of uneasiness. If he had remained home, as often, coming twenty times or more before noon, to do something to please her, or claim some attention, never content unless near her, surely her heart would have faltered and failed completely.

It was quite dark when he returned. After supper he bade Effie "good-night," saying:

"I've had a trying day, and must rest now."

Everything seemed to facilitate her going.

"Why should she longer hesitate?" she thought.

An hour after, she stole out and sped quickly to the place where Albert was waiting to receive her.

"My own! my darling, brave little girl!" he exclaimed, as he started forward to receive her, and place her in the carriage.

"Oh, Albert, don't call me brave! I'm wicked; I feel it truly. And you—oh, perhaps after a while, you may—I cannot bear to speak it—you may love me less for this act," sobbed Effie.

"Hush! You shall not talk so, you silly little love! Have you not proved to me your love? which will make me love you *more*, if possible."

He drew her within his arms and tried to quiet her fears, but her heart was throbbing wildly, and her agitation seemed to increase as she was carried further from her home. At length Albert, wearied with his fruitless efforts to comfort her, said:

"Effie, this is childish nonsense. Calm yourself and listen to me."

She interrupted him by crying:

"Take me back to papa, Albert. Oh, please! Indeed my heart will break, if you do not! Take me back; papa will forgive us."

A contemptuous smile, which it was well she could not see, was on his lips, as he said:

"Not to-night, Effie. To-morrow, if you wish. I have been waiting for you to get somewhat calm, to tell you that I have been disappointed in my plans, which will delay our union until to-morrow. A few hours only lost. In the mean time you will remain with my aunt—"

"No, no—*no!* Take me home!" she cried, interrupting him. "It will kill papa! Oh, you promised I should return before I was missed! Oh, why did I leave home without his blessing!"

"Is is *too late* to repent it, Effie. You are mine now," he said, in a tone new to her ear—cold and cruel.

Poor child! she was too frightened to deny his false words. Never is it too late to repent a wrong action; never too late to retrieve the past, bitter and dark though it may be; never, while on earth, loving friends, with sympathy and help, will meet us; never, while in heaven our Father, who judges the heart alone, knowing its weakness, is waiting to receive us, to bid us be at peace.

At his first harsh words the poor child had withdrawn from his arms, and sank back weeping in the corner of the carriage.

"Effie, will you act rationally, and listen to me?" Albert asked, in a modified tone.

But she only answered:

"Take me home, please, Albert. Let me call to the man to turn his horses."

She sprang forward, and tapped sharply on the window back of the driver.

Immediately, before Albert had succeeded in drawing her back to the seat, the horses stopped; and an instant after, the driver opened the door, and said:

"The harness has given way, and it is so dark I can hardly manage to fix it alone. Will you please, sir, to lend me a helping hand?"

When Albert left the carriage, Effie's first impulse was to spring out and try to find her way back home. But an instant's reflection on the strange neighborhood, the darkness, and the late hour of the night, frightened her. Before she had time to think of any other plan she heard coming steps. The door was closed, and again they were in motion. She heard the cracking of the whip, and the urging of the horses to greater speed. Again she cried:

"Take me home to father. Oh, why did I leave him? Please, Albert, have pity!"

"Effie!"

The tone was loving and gentle. She put forth her hand and peered through the darkness, trying to see his face. Again came the loving tone:

"Effie!" and with it the glad cry of "Father!" and the answering:

"Yes, daughter, you are *safe* with father."

She was sobbing on his bosom. No words of chiding reached her ear—gently soothing her on the way until they reached home. She made no inquiry of Albert's whereabouts. She felt she had escaped from evil. That hour's drive had revealed to her his true nature. There was more *dread* than *love* in her heart then. All her father's words came back with full force, and she thanked Heaven for her deliverance.

"Sleep to-night, love, and to-morrow I will explain all that of course is mysterious now," her father said.

"Can you forgive and trust me again, father?" she whispered, when he met her, with more than usual affection, the next morning.

"I've nothing to forgive, love, for I permitted your going," he answered, as he drew her down beside him.

She looked strangely and inquiringly into his eyes.

"I will tell you about it, love. Yesterday morning John Brooks came to me, and began by saying:

"'Master, when I was a slave you always treated me kind—you and your father before you. Now I'm come to do you a good turn, may be; but, for the Lord's sake, make it all right for me somehow. For I know that Barton blood; they wouldn't mind shooting a darkey any time.'

“ ‘What do you mean, John?’ I asked, growing anxious at hearing Barton's name.

“ ‘I an't certain myself, sir, what it means; but Mr. Albert 's engaged my carriage to be at your garden gate to-night.’

“Thanking John, and promising to provide for his safety, I determined on my course. Having no one I felt so free to ask for assistance as George Wilton, I told him my plan. It needed but a little darkening of Wilton's face, John's coat and hat, to make him pass very well, in the dark, for the driver engaged. I was hid from sight. John we tied, to give him a good story to tell. After you were in the carriage, I mounted with George to the seat. We were about getting to the cross in the road where we intended to halt, and under pretext of the accident to the harness, get Albert Barton out, when your tapping on the window hastened us. So, my child, while that evil man was cutting some holes in a piece of old leather, to repair, as he supposed, the broken part, I stepped into the carriage. In an instant George sprang to his seat, put whip to the horses, and left Barton to find his way to N—— as best he could.

“I preferred to let you find him out as he truly is. I would otherwise have stopped you last night from leaving home. Effie, my child, tell your father: Do you still think of him as you did? Are you willing to trust your happiness to his keeping?”

“No, O no; never speak of him, father. I could never trust him again,” Effie answered in a low tone, her face crimsoning with mortification.

"No, my child; never trust any man who counsels you to deceive those who have loved and watched over you all your life. There, there, do not cry. We will never mention this again. My little girl would have been wiser perhaps, had she not been motherless."

Albert Barton never came near Effie again. Shortly after, he left the village for the far West. George Wilton's continued devotion, and sterling traits of character, at last made a deep and favorable impression on Effie. Her father notices with joy that she makes a careful toilet every afternoon, and, sitting by the window, watches for the coming of somebody. The somebody always proves to be the same body. He is welcomed with a smile which promises the fulfillment of his dearest hopes.